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What themes emerge in narratives for participants of Air Force ROTC programs? Are there  
shared incentives to join this organization?

Organizational Communication Studies Capstone

University of Portland

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### **Abstract**

This study uses qualitative research methods and narrative style interviews to collect data. Data is analyzed using Structuration Theory to answer the questions: What themes emerge in participants of Air Force ROTC programs? Are there shared incentives to join this organization? Three themes emerged from the data. The first theme, Play to get Paid, highlights members motivation to utilize this program for the financial benefits. The second theme, Career Aspirations, show how some members are drawn to specific career paths offered by the Air Force ROTC programs. Many agreed that the ROTC program was the most beneficial way to enter the United States Air Force. The final theme is Finding your Wingmen. This theme emerged as participants reflected on the relationships they formed in the program to be one of the most rewarding aspects. An analysis of interview transcripts reveals the value of the comradery established is a significant incentive to participants initial motivations.

## **Introduction**

The National Center for Education Statistics claims that about 80 percent of students in the United States will change their major at least once, but on average they will change majors at least three times over the course of their college career (Ramos, 2013). Each year, students younger than this decide not only on their major, but also a career path. When high school seniors commit to Reserve Officer Training Corps they are not only committing to college but also a minimum of four years after graduation. These students are deciding their major, part of their career, and to serve their country, before graduating high school. What is it about organizations like the Air Force that draw in students at such a young age? This study aims to examine the themes that emerge in narratives for participants of Air Force ROTC programs. It also aims to explore the possibility of shared incentives that draw in the participants. The goal of the study is to look for any common motivations or incentives as well as examining the various participants in the organization.

Through communication, if we can understand why people utilize ROTC programs to join the Air Force, we can also better understand how they create a collective identity through the motivations of the individuals. We communicate every day through verbal and nonverbal means. This communication can provide a great deal of insight to the people around us and organizations. For example, if you are applying for a job at a new company you might want to learn more about that company. The way the company communicated themselves through websites or other advertisements can help you decide if they would be a good fit for you. If you find someone who works for that company and ask them about their job, this too can give insight to the company culture and happiness of the employees. If the person you are talking to is very animated and excited to talk about their job, you might see their enthusiasm and be more eager to

join vs. An employee who shrugs and uses bland unenthusiastic ways of talking about their job.

In the same way, when we use communication to examine the Air Force ROTC program, we can learn a great deal about the participants and the organization itself. This study wants to learn why participants chose to join the program and the way they talk about these motivations could allow us to see commonalities or even areas for improvement. When you are at a restaurant and trying to decide what to order, is it the pictures on the menu that catch your attention? Or is it the way that burger is described as ‘mouth-watering’? What is it about the Air Force ROTC that catches people’s eye and are these attractors similar among participants?

Military careers tend to face more challenges than non-military. A large part of this is due to the lifestyle and having to move locations every 2-3 years. This study can provide insight to job satisfaction within this group. Communication would allow us to see that even though there are challenges to this career path, there are certain motivators to it as well. Understanding what those are can then be utilized towards fostering a greater environment for participants by acknowledging these incentives. This is an empirical project that will be looking at a small group of people in this organization but still hopes to be beneficial to future studies. Using narrative style interviews, this study allows participants to tell their own story of how they came to be a part of this organization.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study will specifically focus on the way participants explain their rationale for joining the Air Force ROTC program. In a narrative style of interview, participants will be asked to tell their story and then be prompted with additional questions. Later analysis of this data will look for reoccurring themes or incentives that are shared amongst participants. This study

also aims to understand how such a large organization attracts so many unique individuals. How do these participants communicate their motivations? As a researcher, what does the way participants communicate their ideals say about their relationship to ROTC?

### **Structuration Theory**

This paper will be using Structuration Theory to examine the literature with the goal of understanding a participant's motivations and how this organization will fulfill them. This theory points the researcher's attention to the relationship between individuals and institutions. The focus is on the ways in which cultures, organizations, and social systems are created through micro-practices of individual people. This explores the idea of the duality of structure which means that rules, policies, and structures are only valid when individuals follow and make decisions based upon them. This theory helps to explain 'transformation and change' and considers the power structure of organizations (Tracy, 59-60). Structuration theory is developed by Anthony Giddens and offers a useful lens to see day-to-day interactions that create work/life balances for employees. The main concern is to understand how human interactions and social structures join to challenge social institutions (Symbolic Interactionism as an Approach to the Study of Human Communication, 1977).

This theory is relevant to this study because it can help to provide insight to the motivations of the individuals joining Air Force ROTC by looking into the relationship between the individuals and the institution. This theory focuses on values and values can play a key role in people's motivations. Perhaps being able to understand the values of an individual will provide information about the incentive for them to join an organization like the Air Force. The way an organization expresses and follows their value is also important. If a company states they

value recycling and environmental efforts, but then used harmful and wasteful practices, this will affect the way that organization is viewed. When values are not expressed or followed, it reflects negatively on the organization as a whole and even the members of that individual. The way the Air Force expresses and honors their values can be an important factor for people considering becoming a member. This theory will also draw attention to the micro-practices of individual people associated with Air Force ROTC. This can be seen in certain vernacular that may be used amongst this group. Another aspect is the social systems that are created. What does it take to be a member of these inside groups and once you join ROTC are you automatically indoctrinated, or do you have to earn it? Especially in ridged environment like the Air Force, there is a great deal of attention paid to the rules and policies. This theory uses the idea of the duality of structure to account for these rules only having this effect because the participants make decisions based upon them.

### **Historical Significance**

Especially following the Cold War, American military attitudes have always been distrustful towards other standing amines. Along with this, colleges and universities have had a role in the shaping of militaries. Michael Neiberg discusses the American belief “that the military must be subservient to civilian interests for it to truly represent and defend the interests of the society it serves” (2001, p.13). The Reserve Officer Training Corps. Or ROTC is a college-based officer commissioning program. While based primarily in the United States, the goal is to recruit and train future officers in branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. The largest and oldest source of commissioned officers of the Air Force is the headquarters of Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. Most Air Force ROTC detachments are staffed by an active duty colonel, four officers and two enlisted personnel. As stated by Colonel Vic Sowers “The ROTC

program is part of an undergraduate degree program whose purpose is to recruit and educate candidates as college students and commission them upon graduation as second lieutenants to fill Air Force requirements” (2006, p. 4).

### **Themes of the Literature**

Through a study of literature around both the United States Air Force and ROTC programs, a few main themes have emerged. The first theme “Play to get Paid”. This theme encapsulates the financial benefits received through this program. Like many of us know, going to college is expensive. Research suggest that many lower -class students view ROTC as a good way to pay for their college education. The Air Force offers three main types of scholarships for the various candidates. These scholarships can be awarded in as many as four-years and as little as one-year. In the case of some majors, this scholarship can even be extended to five-years but that will require additional service commitment as compensation. While the most extensive scholarship one can be awarded will cover full tuition, most fees, and \$600 per year for books, others will vary. As an added incentive, cadets will receive a monthly nontaxable stipend that increases in value as the cadets proceed into their upper division years. Most graduating cadets will go straight into active duty upon commissioning and serve a four-year commitment. For some such as pilots, this commitment will be extended to ten years after they complete their pilot training (Sowers, 2006). For many that would have to struggle to find a way to pay for college, a four-year post-graduation commitment where you both being paid and gaining job experience, does not sound like a bad deal.

The second theme is the desire to become a pilot. Like the financial reasons listed above, to become a pilot is very expensive and worth a ten-year service commitment. However, more



than that is the desire to become a pilot. As quoted in the first line of Foundations of Air Power “Man’s urge to fly is older than history” (1958, p.7). The main assumption of the Air Force is that people join to become pilots. While there are many members of the Air Force that are not Pilots, it remains a very coveted position. There are also rigorous selection methods to becoming a pilot and while you may receive an ROTC scholarship, the chances of becoming a pilot are much slimmer. Some of the qualification standards for pilots include physical fitness, educational achievement, aptitude tests, anthropometric standards, and successful performance in a flight screening program. A profile of a candidate is then sent to a selection board who will decide if they are awarded a pilot slot. Once that slot is received, the process is far from over. The individual will still have to go through medical examinations and other test before becoming an official Air Force pilot (Carretta, 2000). Despite all of this, becoming a pilot is still a main motivation for many joining the Air Force.

The third emergent theme is the desire to be a part of something bigger than yourself. This desire is one that can be felt in many people all in different areas of their lives, but still it is common among the literature here. Terms such as “wingman” are used to indicate that you are part of a bigger whole and together form something greater. It would be highly unlikely for a participant to join an organization like this without a desire to want to work for a greater goal. Team building is an especially prominent component of ROTC training which helps to accomplish this greater desire. “Team building leads to a sense of belonging and helps individuals see themselves as an integral part of their organization” as stated by Chen, Chen, & Tsao in their article on team building in ROTC (2009). This greater notion of being part of something more than yourself is found in the teams that are built with this program. As with any

military service position, the underlying assumption is that these participating individuals will hold this desire to some regard.

This study aims to help understand what motivates individuals to join the Air Force by way of a Reserve Officer Training Program. If we can understand these incentives, then we could potentially reach a larger audience as well as create a more pleasing environment for those that are a part of it. On many college campuses the ROTC programs are only a small fraction of the student body and this minority group is often misunderstood by the rest of the population. This study can also provide new perspectives for this organization. If we are to be citizens of the United States, we should at least try to understand the people that are devoting their lives to serving our country. This level of knowledge could lead to a new respect for these participants, especially under the current political climates that lead our country to be divided on such matters. Being able to reflect on the motivations of an individual can help to generate awareness and appreciation especially for careers we would not envision for ourselves. This study could be beneficial to ROTC units all over the country as well as the universities that they are a part of. It could also provide valuable information to prospects of ROTC programs so that they can gain insight about what they are signing up for. Finally, this study could be used by non-ROTC individuals to get a better understanding of this group of people. The aim of this study is to ask what themes emerge in narratives for joining the Air Force ROTC? Not only what motivated these people to join, but what are the tenets that keep them?

## **Research Questions**

With consideration of this integrative theoretical frame that uses qualitative research methods and Structuration Theory to emphasize the concept of Identity and Community, two research questions are proposed for the present study:

RQ #1: What themes emerge in narratives for Participants of Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Programs?

RQ#2: Are there shared incentives to join this organization amongst participants?

These research questions address the identified gaps in the current literature around the motivations to join Air Force ROTC programs. This study seeks to deeper understand the draws of Air Force through ROTC and the members that choose to partake.

## **Method**

### **A Qualitative Approach**

This project is done in a qualitative research methods approach. Qualitative methods are an “umbrella phrase that refers to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of interview, participant observation, and document data in order to understand and describe meanings, relationships, and patterns” (Tracy, 2013, p.36). As a method, qualitative research involves key characteristics that will be utilized to help make sense of the research. There are three main qualitative concepts that are used to collect data. The first is self-reflexivity. This is the practice of considering the ways a researcher own points of view will impact their interpretation of a research scene (Tracy, 2013, p.2). It is important for the researcher to acknowledge their background and the impact that it has on the way they view research site. Context is the second concept where researchers will immerse themselves in a scene to then make sense of it. This is where a researcher will purposely make note of small cues that help them decide how to behave

(Tracy, 2013, p.3). Using these small cues and other context they make bigger knowledge claims about the culture they are studying. The final concept is thick description. This is where researchers immerse themselves in the culture to examine circumstances present and move towards creating greater theories (Tracy, 2013, p.3). With these concepts being used to collect the data, one can then move into the characteristics of the qualitative research process.

First, bricolage describes the practice of using the data available to you to creatively make use of a variety of data pieces. It is described as the researcher being the weaver of a quilt who brings a variety of patches together to create one piece that tells a symbolic story. Another key characteristic is using a funnel for research. Using this method, the researcher starts with a broad opening and narrows down the data as more information and directions are learned. The German word Gestalt translates into 'shape' which describes the qualitative research process where the integrated culture is greater than the individual parts. Therefore, you are shaping the culture as a whole by using the individual parts. The final key characteristic is the jumping off point of the study known as sensitizing concepts. These provide theoretical framework and help to sensitize the researcher to see more of what is wanted (Tracy, 2013, p.25-28)

When looking at the nature of the qualitative methods used in this study, they will be following an inductive approach. An examination of the specifics of an organization and the patterns that are found comes from this inductive approach. Rather than having a very specific starting point, the interpreter will make claims as things appear in the research (Tracy, 2013, p.21). This research offers the chance for the researcher to be self-reflexive. Self-reflexivity is when the past experiences of the researcher are taken into account to bring to light points of view that influence the way the researcher views an organization. While we learn through experiences, researchers need to take into account their own lenses when going into a study. Therefore, as a

researcher you want to constantly be paying attention to your own thoughts and actions in the study (Tracy. 2013, p.2-3)

This study utilizes narrative inquiry to attain the stories and deeper meanings of participants. Using narrative inquiry for sharing, analyzing, constructing and interpreting stories, the researcher is given the opportunity to articulate these interpretations regarding their motivations. This deeper understanding can then result in providing insight to areas that may need change or places where more focus should be given. This insight can then allow reflection on our past experiences to then act with foresight (Barkhuizen, & Hacker, 2008, p.36-38). Using the narrative inquiry of a range of participants, this study hopes to gain insight to the inspiration for these people joining the United States Air Force through the college Reserve Officer Training Corps. Eight participants will be partaking in semi-structured narrative style interviews. Participants fall into the age range of 18- 24. Initially participants were selected by being assigned a number and then using a random number generator. Because of external forces, some of the initially randomly selected participants were not able to participate so researcher tried to maintain randomization while working with availability.

### **Findings**

The United States Air Force is a very large organization where individuals from diverse backgrounds buy into collectivist ideas. Examining the themes that emerge in narratives for participants of Air Force ROTC programs has led to three major themes. While all three themes are consistent with the literary research, two themes specifically address what motivated participants to join the organization. The third theme categorizes what keeps them motivated in the program and the best aspects of it. The first two themes are Play to get Paid and Career

Aspirations. This third theme of Finding your Wingmen utilizes jargon named by the Air Force to highlight this unique relationship. Aside from the logistical answers and commitments, the relationships formed in the program appear to be a highlight of ROTC. The following section will explicate these themes in more depth.

### **Play to get Paid**

The first theme is Play to get Paid was expected and is completely consistent with the literature around this topic. As we have seen in the literary review above, this relies on the financial support that is offered to qualified participants of the ROTC programs. In order to receive the financial benefits of having your college education paid for, you need to play the game of ROTC cadet and follow all the rules. Every year millions of high school students must face the dilemma of figuring out how to pay for college. While some students have parents or grandparents that have saved or are willing to fund their college education, others rely on academic or athletic scholarships. Still others take out loans and suffer large amounts of student debt to repay after college. For many of the cadets, having their college degree paid for through the Air Force ROTC seemed like their best option. When asked about the motivations to join the ROTC program one cadet remarks “I first came especially because of the financial benefits of all or most of my college paid for. So that is a huge benefit to know that I don’t have this huge debt” (Interview transcript #7, P. 1). Depending on the type of scholarship a cadet receives, they could have all their tuition covered and even room and board. That is a huge relief to many college students.

Another component to these financial motivations is having a degree to fall back on. In one interview a cadet remarked “Knowing that in the high likelihood that I ended up either

injured in training or on active duty. I wanted a degree to fall back on” (Interview transcript #8 p. 2). For people who want to join the military, there are multiple ways to do so, like discussed above. What keeps a cadet from enlisting right out of high school can be the financial benefits of ROTC providing them with a college degree. Should something happen to you while serving in the military, ROTC provides a backup plan and allows you to find a job. Of course, you can find jobs without a college degree, but having one proves to be much more financially rewarding and allows for a variety of possibilities.

### **Career Aspirations**

The second theme discovered from the interviews was the career aspirations. This theme is also consistent with the previous literature. Instead of the specific categorization of participants wanting to become pilots, this theme encompasses other career paths as well. When people hear Air Force, they will often immediately think of airplanes. Flying those airplanes is a dream for many people. “Man’s urge to fly is older than history” (Foundations of Air Power. P. 7). When some do not fully understand where this desire came from, it can be traced back to Greek Mythology and the tale of Icarus crafting wings of feathers and wax, but meeting his demise when he flew too close to the sun and the wax melted away. Many people will find themselves drawn to the Air Force when they discover they share this desire. “Since before I could spell the word pilot, I wanted to be one, at age two or three. From then on, I was addicted to flight simulators, playing with little toy airplanes, building models, etc.” (Interview transcript #6, p.1). It is not uncommon for small children to latch onto a profession early in their childhood. It can be hard to uncover the reasoning behind these desires, but for some people, they have their careers decided from a very young age. “I chose to join the Air Force ROTC because I wanted to be a pilot in the US Air Force... The actual answer is I have no idea. I’ve just always wanted to”.

One important distinction is that wanting to be a pilot and specifically a pilot of the Air Force is slightly different. The Air Force offers a certain appeal of flying fast maneuverable aircraft. While piloting a commercial airliner also has its perks, it is hard to compete with the fighter planes. This is a huge motivator for many cadets who have chosen to join Air Force ROTC.

Other career aspirations are a strong motivator to join ROTC as well. Aside from Pilots, the Air Force offers a variety of positions. Some of these are more generic, like you would find at any organization, while others are much more specialized. One cadet stated they joined the ROTC because they wanted to become a Combat Rescue Officer or Special Tactics Officer. These specialized positions require additional levels of training and assessments. The pararescue operators are tasked with the recovery and medical treatment of personnel in humanitarian and combat environments. This is a unique type of career and therefore can be found using more unique channels. While many may share a desire to help and serve underprivileged communities, this is another way to do so within the bounds of the Air Force.

Similar to this is the desire to be a doctor. Many people will aspire for a career in the medical field and in an interview a cadet mentions the specific drive of using ROTC to get into medical school. While this desire can be like the previous theme of Play to get Paid, this cadet spoke of the specific desire to become a psychiatrist. Military members sacrifice a lot while serving their country and their mental health is no exception. Research has shown that Post Traumatic Stress Disorders or PTSD among veterans varies depending on which war they were a part of. One of the worst outcomes from this disorder is suicide and it is unfortunately increasing among veterans. From 2008 through 2016 there were more than 6,000 veteran suicides each year. After accounting for age and gender, a 2016 study revealed that the suicide rate was 1.5 times larger for veterans than other non-veteran adults (Statistics on PTSD in Veterans). The



combination of wanting a medical career and to serve a population who was struggling lead to the opportunity with the ROTC.

### **Finding your Wingmen**

Where the research indicated participants would be motivated to join the Air Force because it would be doing something “Greater than self”, this study did not find this to be accurate. Virtually none of participants mentioned joining for that reason. Instead the third theme emerged when participants were asked “what is the best part of ROTC?”. Virtually all the participants had some version of the same answer to this question. “Definitely the people” remarks one cadet. They went on to talk about the community that is formed and how the stressful environment is made better just having the people around you who are going through the same thing. They mentioned when they struggle with topics or procedures, they can discuss this with their fellow ROTC classmates to then work on it together. “All of your classmates are really ready to help you” and a support system is created in the program. College can be a daunting idea for many and it can be easy to get lost in it all but having an additional group that you are a member of like ROTC makes it easier to feel connected and at home. Merriam-Webster dictionary has two definitions for the term wingman. The first is “a pilot who flies behind and outside the leader of a flying formation”. The second or informal definition is “a male friend or partner who accompanies and supports a man in some activity” (Wingman). In this context, wingman is a mixture of both definitions. It is utilized to show a good friend who has your back while being appropriate for an Air Force setting with the technical definition. While the general population may only know this in terms of a dating scene, it has an entirely new meaning that is created by these cadets to emphasize their relationships with one another. Another cadet talks about staying in the program because of the end goal only to follow with

“what keeps me not hating my life is the people in it”. You are placed into an environment and given a core group of people that tend to be very likeminded to yourself. These people share your goals and you get to make strong relationships. The cadet remarks that these relationships are very nice to have among all the stress college students face and “what keeps me going”.

Many students across the world strive to find a core group of friends while in college. For the ROTC cadets, they feel as though they are given a secondary friend group through the close bonds formed while in the program. Another cadet describes the camaraderie and friendships to be the most enjoyable aspects of the program. “There’s some absolutely fantastic people” remarks another cadet. One graduating cadet looks back over their college experience and remarks that these are the people they are going to try to stay in touch with. The relationships that are formed within this organization are more than common friendships. Instead it can be described as the “got your six fraternity” or brotherhood, a relationship that invites a much deeper level of connection. Even this quote is special to military personal while referencing “six” to refer to your back after the idea of standing at the center of a clock facing the twelve, and the six is directly behind you. The use of the word fraternity implies a chosen relationship which shared ideals, like you would find if you were to join the Greek life offered on certain college campuses. To experience this brotherhood, you also must be willing to commit to this environment. Perhaps investing in this program is easier when you are doing it together. While it would be easy for a person to decide to spend as little time with ROTC related people as possible, the interviewees have seemed to invest in this group of people. “When I first met all my friends, I could tell they were going to be my friends for a long time”. There seems to be something in the very nature of this program that fosters these relationships. Perhaps it is that cadets have found the best way to survive all the trainings is to rely on one another. Maybe it is

just the peace of mind that other people are going through a very similar experience to you.

While many of their college peers cannot relate to the additional expectations the ROTC cadets have, they know they can find solidarity in one another.

### **Discussion**

Upon reflection, the initial findings of this project were consistent with research data. By opening the door of communication amongst ROTC cadets and their motivations to join the program, two main themes have emerged that are consistent with previous data. The first theme of Play to get Paid reflects the idea that lower-class students utilize this program to pay for their college education. The students who sign up for this must also be willing to commit to several years of service following their graduation. This opens the door to a new way to pay for college that many may not consider. For some, they chose to stay in state or attend community colleges to make it more feasible given their financial situation. Others have found their solution by committing to ROTC programs. But what are the downfalls to those who just view this program as a way to pay for college? Perhaps these students are not as invested into the Air Force as their peers. At the same time, given that many people join this organization when they are financially motivated, what does that say about Air Force ROTC when they find the best part of the program to be the people in it? What is it about people that are attracted to an organization like this that also allows them to build a brotherhood with one another? Structuration theory draws out attention to this very relationship. When focusing on the way's organizations are created through the micro-practices of individual people, we see that the Air Force ROTC program is so much more than a way to pay for college. While there are certainly downsides to any organization, participants find happiness and motivation through the others in the program.

## **Theoretical Significance**

Military members are a seclusive yet expansive group. Expectations change based on the specific branch, yet members come from all over the country and are placed all over the world. To study the communication aspects of this organization can provide a great amount of information as to how so many individuals conform to meet the ideals of the Air Force. While communication is essential to our collective functioning as human beings, ROTC cadets are trained to communicate in specific ways. Their nonverbal communication sends important messages to one another and leadership about performance and understanding of materials. Verbally they are taught to deliver succinct and to the point messages. The communication methods of ROTC help to show the acceptance of group think the members have. While this general group of people have been trained and practice efficient communication, they seem to lack in their emotional communication. While no evidence of these issues was prevalent in the interviews conducted for this study, military members in general face a greater risk of trauma. Mental and emotional trauma not uncommon amongst military members. So for people who are so well trained in delivering important messages, why do these messages fail when it comes to their own mental health? Perhaps it is at the ROTC level where participants should also be taught to process the traumas that they may incur. This study aimed to discover what motivated participants to join ROTC. We have discovered two main themes consistent with literature and a third unexpected theme. The first two themes of Play to get Paid and Career Aspirations categorize the reason people join the military. The question that needs to be asked is what happens when those motivations are fulfilled? The members who join the organization to pay for college, earn their degree and then what? These people must now find new motivations to replace what they had been working towards for the last four or five years. When they reach this

goal, do they find fulfillment? For those that joined to pursue a specific career, is that career what they thought it would be?

One of the problems with the ROTC is that members are then tied into a contract. If we follow the “there is no such thing as a free lunch” mantra, then it is more than fair that the cadets are required to serve for a number of years post-graduation. If the Air Force is paying to put you through college, asking for years of service as repayment is a just deal. Many people recognize this and that is why they join the program. Based on what we know about college students changing their major and making the tie to adults changing career paths, what happens to this population. If they feel as though they are trapped into an agreement they made when they were senior high school students, what can the Air Force do to re-motivate members? Qualitative methods research styles allow us to look at an umbrella of areas that influence and contribute to organizations. ROTC is just one aspect of the Air Force. Using a qualitative method approach this study was able to make three general categories for cadets. It also showed that there are many more ideas that need to be explored to best understand this population.

Based on the data conducted through this study, the Air Force and ROTC program specifically should give more attention to the comradery aspects of their program. While careers and finances motivate participants to join the program, the friendships are what members walk away with at the end of the day. For an organization that operated in numerous places, they should make sure this brotherhood is maintained across all platforms. For seven of eight participants to respond with the same gist is significant enough to warrant further study. While many members may oppose being forced to befriend another person, cadets seem to be united with shared struggles. Because this theme is already found in this community, ROTC should ask themselves to strive to maintain it once cadets graduate and become officers.

## **Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this study is the number of participants. Because this study was done under strict time constraints, there was not time for more interviews. If this study were expanded to more participants, it would be interesting to see if the same themes were common in those narratives as well. Another limitation of this study is geographical location. This study took place at one specific ROTC program. These programs are found all over the country at various colleges and universities. This study should be expanded to numerous programs with more participants from each. There is also the matter of the class status of participants. While it was intended to represent each academic class evenly, that was not possible due to unforeseen circumstances. Conducting interviews across the classes could provide rich data as to whether motivations change for an individual from their freshman year to their senior.

## **Conclusion**

This study answered the research questions: What themes emerge in narratives for Participants of Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Programs? And are there shared incentives to join this organization amongst participants. Qualitative research methods to conduct narrative style interviews, highlighted the use of Structuration Theory to conduct and make sense of the research. Many participants were motivated by financial means given the theme Play to get Paid. These members utilized the ROTC program to fund their college degree. While themselves or their families may not have been able to afford a college education, participants were motivated to join ROTC in order to fulfill that underlying desire. Even the cadets who want to peruse a specific military career want the option of having a college degree to fall back on. These cadets recognize the danger their career path could have and the chance of injury is higher

for them. If that were to happen, they want the security blanket that a college degree provides. Other members are motivated to join ROTC because of the careers it can provide. For a good many this career is a pilot. There is a particular draw to piloting such prestigious aircraft and many join the program hoping to do just that. The final theme of Finding your Wingmen was surprising but extremely consistent throughout the data. This theme consisted of participants commenting specifically on the importance of the relationships they had built as a result of the ROTC program. This comradery and solidarity proved to be some of the most satisfactory outcomes of this organization according to individual members. Opening communication channels in this organization has allowed for further research and data collection.

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